

17  
Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society.

Vol. xvi., pages 132—146.

---

THE WILL  
OF  
Thomas Browne

MERCER, CHEAPSIDE, LONDON,

FATHER OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE OF NORWICH.

---

Remarks on the early life of Sir Thomas Browne,

TOGETHER WITH

The Oration delivered by him at the

Inauguration of Pembroke College, Oxford, 1624 ;

ALSO THE

Will of Sir Thomas Browne, 1679 ;

BY

CHARLES WILLIAMS, F.R.C.S.E.



*hbt compo*

THE WILL  
OF  
**Thomas Browne**

MERCER, CHEAPSIDE, LONDON,

FATHER OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE OF NORWICH.

---

Remarks on the early life of Sir Thomas Browne,

TOGETHER WITH

The Oration delivered by him at the

Inauguration of Pembroke College, Oxford, 1624 ;

ALSO THE

Will of Sir Thomas Browne, 1679 ;

BY

CHARLES WILLIAMS. F.R.C.S.E.

Norwich:

GOOSE AND SON, PRINTERS, RAMPANT HORSE STREET.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015

<https://archive.org/details/b22406785>



The Will  
of  
Thomas Browne, Mercer, Cheapside,  
London,

FATHER OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE OF NORWICH.

REMARKS ON THE EARLY LIFE OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE

TOGETHER WITH

THE ORATION DELIVERED BY HIM

AT THE INAUGURATION OF PEMBROKE

COLLEGE, OXFORD, 1624 ;

ALSO THE

WILL OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE, 1679.

COMMUNICATED BY

CHARLES WILLIAMS, F.R.C.S.E.

---

In the Name of God. Amen.

The nine and twentieth day of September, Anno Domini, one thousand, six hundred, and thirteen, in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith. That is to say, of England, France, and Scotland the eleventh, and of Scotland the seven and fortieth.

I, Thomas Browne, Citizen, and Mercer of London, weak of body but strong in faith, and of perfect memory,

praise be therefore given to God, do make and declare this my last will and testament in form following:—

First, and principally, I do commit my soul unto God, hoping to be saved by the merit and bitter death and passion of my Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus, and by no other means.

My body I commit to the earth, whereof it is made, and to be buried in such decent and Christian-like manner, as unto my executors hereafter named shall be thought fit.

My will and mind is, that all such debts as I shall owe to any person or persons be well and truly satisfied within convenient time by them after my decease, and after my debts and funeral expenses discharged,

I will, and my mind is that such goods and chattels whatsoever that hath pleased God to bestow on me, shall be, according to the laudable custom of the City of London, divided into three equal and equivalent parts and portions.

One full third part whereof I give and bequeath unto Anne my loving wife, and other full third part I give and bequeath unto Thomas Browne, Anne Browne, Jane Browne, and Mary Browne, the children of me the said Thomas Browne and Anne Browne my wife; and unto such child or children as Anne my now wife is great withal, equally amongst them to be divided; and the other third or last part of all my said goods and chattels whatsoever into three parts divided, I reserve unto myself to pay such legacies and otherwise to dispose thereof as hereafter, in this my last will and testament, I have set down, nominated, and appointed the same.

I do give and bequeath unto Bridget Smithwicke, the daughter of Anne Smithwicke, widow, twenty pounds of lawful money of England, to be paid unto her at her full age of one and twenty years, or day of marriage, first and which happening; and if it shall

happen the said Bridget Smithwicke do die and depart this natural life before she shall come to her full age of one and twenty years, or be married, then I do give and bequeath the said twenty pounds unto and amongst my said children, Thomas, Anne, Jane, and Mary, and such child or children as my said wife is now big withal, equally amongst them to be divided.

Then I do give and bequeath unto my brother, William Browne, twenty pounds current English money.

Then I will and my mind is, that if it shall happen the said Thomas Browne, Anne Browne, Jane Browne, or Mary Browne, or such child or children as the said Anne, my wife, is now great withal, after such time as she shall be delivered thereof, or any of them to die, and depart this mortal life, before such part and portion, as hereby I have willed unto them, shall grow, and to be paid or otherwise, if it shall happen such child or children, as my said wife is now big withal, to be still-born, then my will and meaning is, that the part or portion of him or her so deceasing shall be equally divided unto and amongst the rest of my said children part and part alike.

The rest and residue of all and singular my goods and chattels whatsoever, I do give and bequeath amongst Anne, my said wife, and children, as well those above-named as my said wife is now great withal, equally amongst them to be divided.

And I do ordain, nominate, and appoint the said Anne, my wife, and my loving brother, Edward Browne, citizen and brewer of London, executors of this my last will and testament.

In witness thereof, I, the said Thomas Browne, to this my last will and testament have set my hand and seal, the day and year first above written.

THOMAS BROWNE.

Sealed, subscribed, pronounced, and delivered by the said Thomas Browne as his last will and testament, the day and year above written in the presence of us,

RICHARD ROCHDALE.

WILLIAM HUTTON.

Probate of the will was granted on the fourth day of December, one thousand, six hundred, and thirteen, to Anne Browne, relict of the said deceased and one of the executors named, power being reserved for Edward Browne (brother of the said deceased) the other executor.

---

The said testator, Thomas Browne of London, was the third son of Thomas Browne of Upton, near Chester. The latter married Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry Birkenhead of Huxley, Cheshire, and was the father of eight sons and two daughters. Of the sons, the third, Thomas, went to London and carried on the business of a mercer. He lived in the parish of St. Michael-le-Querne, Cornhill, and married Anne, the daughter of Paul Garraway of Lewes. He had one son and three daughters, as mentioned in his will, and not two sons and two daughters, as is usually stated. The son became the celebrated physician of Norwich. Of the daughters nothing whatever is known. Sir Thomas, in the voluminous correspondence published by Simon Wilkin in 1836, makes no allusion to his father, mother, or sisters—indeed, to none of his numerous relatives; but then, a large portion of Sir Thomas' correspondence still remains unpublished in the Rawlinson and Sloane collections.

The photograph represents a group of the Browne family. The father stands on the left. The mother is seated on the right. Between them are the three daughters, Anne, Jane, and Mary. The future Sir





THE BROWNE FAMILY.

Thomas, the youngest of the four, and apparently about three years of age, is seated on his mother's knees and is nursing a black rabbit.

The painting is in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire, at his residence, Devonshire House, Piccadilly, and his Grace has kindly permitted it to be photographed.

It is supposed to have been painted by Van Somer, a Dutch artist who came to England in 1606, and who painted for the Devonshire family. The first Countess of Devonshire was closely related to Sir Thomas Browne's father.

---

## REMARKS ON THE EARLY LIFE OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

The earliest account known of the life of Sir Thomas Browne is contained in a volume entitled *Posthumous Works* of the learned Sir Thomas Browne, Knight, M.D., late of Norwich. Printed from his original manuscripts, viz., *Repertorium: or, The Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of Norwich; An Account of some Urnes, &c.* found at Brampton in Norfolk, Anno 1667; *Letters between Sir William Dugdale and Sir Thomas Browne; and Miscellanies*, which consist of "A letter to a friend upon the occasion of the death of his intimate friend," and an account of the Norwich Grammar School, which was written by John Burton, Master, and not by Sir Thomas Browne.

This ill-assorted book was published anonymously in 1712, thirty years after the death of Sir Thomas; four years after that of his son, Dr. Edward; two after that of his grandson, Dr. Thomas, in whom the male line became extinct; and one year after the great sale in

London of the libraries of these three individuals, which took place on January 8th, 1711.

It is supposed to have been edited by John Hase, Richmond Herald. The life of the author is very brief; it consists of twenty-three pages, five of which are devoted to a letter from John Merryweather to Sir Thomas. The editor tells us that "Browne's father, dying when he was very young, left him a plentiful fortune, his mother took her third, which was three thousand pounds, and some time after married Sir Thomas Dutton, a worthy person, who held several considerable places in the kingdom of Ireland, by which means he was left to the care of his guardians, who sent him to be educated in grammar learning to Wykeham's School, near Winchester." Then follow "Some minutes for the life of Sir Thomas Browne, by John Whitefoot, M.A., late Rector of Heigham in Norfolk," who had been dead thirteen years. We are informed by him that he "ever esteemed it a special favour of Divine Providence to have had a more particular acquaintance with this excellent person, for two-thirds of his life, than any other man that is now left alive; but that which renders me a willing debtor to his name and family, is the special obligations of favour that I had from him, above most men." Whitefoot is therefore the more to be censured for not availing himself of the opportunity he possessed of writing a complete life of this intimate friend, from whom he received such "special obligations of favour," instead of leaving only that which is contained in his miserably scanty record of fourteen pages.

The next life—also a short one—is prefixed to the sixteenth edition of the *Religio Medici*, published by J. Torbuck, London, 1736; and there it is related that Thomas "was entirely left to the care of his guardians, one of whom had the villany to defraud him of a great

part of his fortune." This assertion is repeated verbatim in the next edition of the *Religio Medici* by Torbuck, in 1738.

Then follows a more temperate account contained in the *Biographia Britannica*, 1748:—"His father left him a considerable fortune, of which he was not a little injured by one of his guardians."

In 1756 Dr. Samuel Johnson edited the second edition of the *Christian Morals*—the first having appeared in 1716—to which he prefixed a life of the author. In this he says that "his mother having taken three thousand pounds as the third part of her husband's property, left her son by consequence six thousand . . . . . But it happened to him, as to many others, to be made poorer by opulence, for his mother *soon married* Sir Thomas Dutton, probably by the inducements of her fortune, and he was left to the rapacity of his guardian, deprived now of both his parents, and therefore helpless and unprotected."

Of these so-called lives, the last is certainly the most deplorable, so far as regards the treatment which the boy Browne is said to have suffered at the hands of his own mother and uncle, the two guardians—the "loving wife" and the "loving brother"—appointed by his father. Surely, they would be too closely related to the boy to be so rapacious as is stated.

Dr. Johnson's account is evidently taken from that by John Hase in the *Posthumous Works*, with unauthorized additions, which are incorrect and completely disproved by the contents of the will.

There is no statement in that document as to the amount of money the father died possessed of. Johnson says the son came into possession of two-thirds, or six thousand. He was ignorant of the fact that there were three sisters as well as the boy, among whom the father willed not "two-thirds," but only "a full third part," to

be equally divided among the four children. This would have the effect of reducing Browne's share to a very small portion.

There is also not a particle of proof in Johnson's remark that the son was, on the marriage of his mother, left "helpless and unprotected." He says she was "soon married." Hase mentions it as having occurred "some time after" the death of her husband, and this account is most likely to be the correct one, as events will prove.

Can it be supposed that a lady of Anne Browne's position would, after the death of her husband, repudiate her children and turn them out of doors "helpless and unprotected"? Is it not more probable that the widow still continued to reside with her family in the home at Cheapside, and very possibly lived there for several years, or until her second marriage rendered it necessary that she should take up her abode with her husband at Isleworth, where was situated the seat of that branch of the Dutton family, and where two daughters were born to them, Elizabeth in 1622 and Lucy in 1623? And here Sir Thomas Dutton died in 1634, after a stormy career as a captain in the wars in the Low Countries, and where, in 1610, he unfortunately killed Sir Hatton Cheke in a duel.

Sir Thomas Browne was born in the parish of St. Michael-le-Querne, Cornhill, in the City of London. The church stood at the top of Cheapside, where the Peel monument now is. The name signifies that it was situated in the corn market. It was burned down at the great fire of 1666, and never rebuilt. Browne's father, as already mentioned, was a mercer, he married Anne, daughter of Paul Garraway of Lewes. Thomas was eight years of age when his father died, in 1613. The portion of money left to the boy was, without doubt,

allowed by the executors, solicitous enough for his welfare, to accumulate during his minority, and to save expense, a scholarship was obtained for him at one of the best schools of that day—Winchester College. Here he entered August 20th, 1616, the sixth on the roll, in his eleventh year. During the greater part of his time at this school he spent his holidays with his mother and sisters at Cheapside. This is abundantly proved by the assertion he makes: that “he knew most of the plants of his country, but did not know so many as when he did but know a hundred, and had scarcely *simpled* further than Cheapside.” Is not Sir Thomas alluding to his boyhood, which must have been spent in London? He could not have *simpled* as a child, but he could do so as a schoolboy, and we know how keen and learned a botanist he became in after years.

After a residence of seven years at Winchester College, Browne’s term of scholarship expired, by reason of his having finished his eighteenth year of age. One of the laws of the College in those days was “that every scholar not founder’s kin—who may stay until he has attained his twenty-fifth year—is to leave on completing his eighteenth year, unless he be then in the roll for New College, Oxford, in which case he may stay on until he succeed to New College, or complete his nineteenth year, and no more.”

The scholarship having terminated at Winchester, leave the College he must, the more especially as it was not his intention to avail himself of a scholarship at New College, to which Winchester was then and is now allied. There was no necessity for him to do so. It was more congenial to his feelings to enter the University as a Fellow Commoner, which he did by matriculating at Broadgates Hall, some time in the year 1623, the exact date being unknown.

This course, so honourable to Sir Thomas, must have been the result of the care and wisdom of his mother and uncle, who, by increasing his patrimony, placed him in a position to be independent of eleemosynary help; he consequently had sufficient means to carry him through his University career, and enough to allow him to acquire a knowledge of his profession by studying at the various celebrated Schools of Medicine which existed on the Continent in those days, and afterwards of spending two years in that delightful valley—Shibden Dale, Yorkshire.

Mr. Edmund Gosse's remarks<sup>1</sup> on this point are very much to the purpose, "Thomas was well educated, and able to travel freely; if his mother abandoned him, and his guardian defrauded him of the greater part of his £1,500, it is difficult to know what were his sources of income . . . there is certainly no evidence of poverty." Even Sir Thomas himself says he "spent his patrimony in travel."

It is a matter of much regret that the unauthentic versions of Sir Thomas' early life should have been stamped with the authority of Samuel Johnson. That alone has enabled it to be copied by editors and publishers of Browne's works even to the present day.

In less than twelve months after Browne's residence at Oxford, Broadgates Hall was incorporated as Pembroke College, so named from that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, Chancellor of the University, to whom Shakespeare addressed 126 of his sonnets, whom Aubrey styles as "the greatest Mæcenas to learned men of any peer of his time or since," and of whom Lord Clarendon says that "he was the most universally beloved and esteemed of any man of that age." To Ben Johnson he sent twenty pounds every New Year's

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Thomas Browne*, by Edmund Gosse, Macmillan & Co., 1905.

Day, with which to purchase books; Inigo Jones visited Italy at his charges; Massinger was trained at Wilton House and supported by the Earl at St. Alban's Hall. A remarkable instance of his generosity deserves to be remembered. Sir Gervas Elwayes was executed for conniving at the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury, and the King gave the Earl all his estates, which came to £1,000 a year; these he freely bestowed on the widow and children. In 1622 the Earl of Pembroke was appointed to fill the honourable office of High Steward of the Cathedral of Norwich; this he held until his death in 1630. He was also Lord Chamberlain to Charles I., and in that capacity it was his place, on one occasion in 1629, to write to the Mayor of Norwich and complain that the twenty-four herring pies sent yearly by the City were not up to the usual standard of excellence, that the herrings were not of "the first new herrings that were taken," that his Majesty "had not the long hundred of 120," that instead of "five being put into every pie at the least, we find but four herrings in divers of them," that they were "not well baked in good and strong pastry," and that "divers of them were much broken," with other complaints, as to which they "must pray your particular answer for our better satisfaction, that we may have no cause to question it further, and so we bid you heartily farewell." On receipt of this admonition the City "promised to be more careful in the matter for the future."

On the occasion of the conversion of Broadgates Hall to Pembroke College (August 5th, 1624), Browne, as the Senior Fellow Commoner, was called upon to deliver the first of the three Latin orations. There was present on that very interesting occasion a large and distinguished company, including the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Prideaux,

Robert, Lord Dormer, afterwards Earl of Carnarvon, and William Dormer, his brother, Sir Francis Godolphin, Sir John Smith, Dr. Daniel Featley (Archbishop Abbot's Chaplain), the Proctors, a great number of other Masters, and the Mayor, Recorder, and principal Burgesses of Abingdon.

At the termination of six years Browne's college life came to an end. He proceeded Master of Arts, June 11th, 1629. He then left his *alma mater* to seek the pleasures and experience of foreign travel, which he did to the full, but of which he has left no memorials that we know of; these may have been lost on the occasion of his shipwreck.

After his return to England, he retired to that charming spot—Shibden Dale—near Halifax, and the selection of this place was intended by him as a tranquil retreat in which to recover his health—no doubt impaired by having suffered the perils of shipwreck, and by the four years' wanderings in France, Spain, Holland, and Italy.

The vale also afforded him the rest he required to compose that piece of serene wisdom—the most eloquent of all his writings—*The Religio Medici*. The locality was never dreamt of by him as that in which to begin the practice of his profession, as so many of his admirers have thought. Had that been his intention, he would have chosen, not a remote spot on the hillside, three miles from the principal town (Halifax), but have gone into the town itself. In this valley Sir Thomas Browne remained during 1634 and 1635, and in the following year finally settled in the City of Norwich, where he practised medicine with great success for forty-six years.

---

THE ORATION DELIVERED BY  
SIR THOMAS BROWNE AT THE INAUGURATION  
OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD,  
AUGUST 5TH, 1624.

Printed by Dr. Henry Savage, Master of Balliol, in his work  
entitled *Balliofergus*, 1661.

THOMAS BROWNE, UNDERGRADUATE-STUDENT, FELLOW  
COMMONER OF THE COLLEGE.

I feel, gentlemen of Broadgates (for you still retain this ancient name that is to be abolished anon), I feel, I say, that each man among you has pricked up his ears, eagerly awaiting the tenor of my speech, and, if I may thus say, itching to hear whether 'tis in disfavour or in favour of them of Pembroke that I have risen to speak. Yet what, I pray you, are these evils, as misjudging men deem them, for which you would have me with lamentations unfeigned, and, as he said, having the breath of life, make moan in high tragic vein? Lo! your hall unfixed and ownerless (for what father or founder of the house can we bring to mind?), a most noble Mæcenus hath taken under his protection, who from a hall, will make it a college, from Broadgates, Pembroke, bestowing thereon his own name, from a hall of brick will make, if I may thus say, aye, and truly too, if one should regard the duration thereof, a college of marble, which not even envy, or only passing envy, shall look upon. Why, shall he who has come forth the founder and author of this benefaction, who has brought about this transformation, shall he be arraigned at the bar on the charge of kind conduct, be impeached for his goodwill? Shall we look askance at him for granting us that which, if we esteem it aright, is a benefaction?

What man among us is so shameless and brazen-fronted as to speak thus? Why, our rights, whatsoever they have been, we retain them all. Although what rights of them of Broadgates, what peculiar interests could we hold to be of such worth that when common advantage is in debate they should not straightway be overthrown and bow before the College of Pembroke? Nevertheless, we have all our rights the same. The same principal and master, the same house, save that it is a nobler one. He of Broadgates is one of Pembroke, and contrariwise, he of Pembroke is one of Broadgates. Trojan and Tyrian have this sole difference: that whereas hitherto I know not by what hap we have borne a title ironically given, we shall now be graced with a name that is truly glorious.

What man of Broadgates then, when he shall see this Phoenix of Pembroke uproused from the ruins of this ancient hall, which all but happeneth at this very moment, will not vaunt his own loss, and congratulate himself on so profitable a deprivation of his name? Let Pembroke now enter within our gates, aye, and within our hearts. This Broadgates of ours in thy hands, most excellent Sir, we deposit as a trust. We cannot bring ourselves to say we *leave* it in thy hands. I say we deposit it with happy omen, to take back anon in the stead of a hall a college, in the stead of a principal a master.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to E. von B. Bensly, late Professor of Classics in the University of Adelaide, and now Professor of Latin at University College, Aberystwyth, for so kindly translating this oration.

## THE WILL OF SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

Dated December 9th, 1679.

In the Name of God. Amen.

I, Thomas Browne, Knight and Dr. of Physick, of the City of Norwich, do make this my last will and testament.

Imprimis. I give and bequeath unto my deare wife, Dame Dorothe Browne, all my lands, leases, and tenements, all my bonds, bills, moveables, money, plate, jewells, and all my goods whatsoever, thereby to have a provision for herself, and make liberall maintenance and portions for my deare daughters Elizabeth Browne and Frances Browne, excepting such lands and tenements as were assigned and made over unto my sonne Edward Browne upon marriage, and to bee entered upon a yeare after my decease.

Item. I appoynt and make my wife, Dame Dorothe Browne, my sole executrix, and give her power to sell all leases, all my goods, moveables, mony, plate, jewells, bonds, and all goods valuable whatsoever, for the provision of herself and of my daughters Elizabeth and Frances Browne, and for the payment of my debts, legacies, and charitable gifts, wherewith she is fully acquainted, and will, I doubt not, performe my will therein. And if it shall please God that my wife Dame Dorothe shall dye before mee, then I make my daughters Elizabeth and Frances my executrices, and give them the same enjoyment and power in my estate as I have before given unto my wife, Dame Dorothe.

This is my last will and testament which I have written with my owne hand, and confirmed it with my hand and seale.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Browne.

Witnesses :—Nicho. Bickerdike, Anthony Mingay, Aug. Briggs, Junior.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Browne's Works, vol. i. Edited by Simon Wilkin, 1836.

